

AMENDMENTSIn the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1-4 (canceled)

5. (Currently amended) A process apparatus including an airtight process vessel, an exhaust system for exhausting gas from the process vessel, and a baffle plate for partitioning the process vessel into a process chamber for processing an object and an exhaust passage communicating with the exhaust system,

wherein the baffle plate includes a plurality of slits through which the process chamber and the exhaust passage communicate with each other,

wherein each slit includes an exhaust-passage opening facing the exhaust passage and a process-chamber opening facing the process chamber,

wherein at least one side of said process-chamber opening includes a sloped inner surface at least along the slit length, said sloped inner surface of the process-chamber opening formed not more than 1/2 of the thickness of the baffle plate and widens towards the process-chamber opening, and

wherein at least one side of said exhaust-passage opening includes an inner surface that is substantially perpendicular to the surface of the baffle plate, said inner surface of the exhaust-passage opening formed not more than 1/2 of the thickness of the baffle plate, and

wherein the width of said exhaust-passage opening is greater than the minimum width of the process-chamber opening that is surrounded by an inner rim of the sloped inner surface.

6. (Previously presented) The process apparatus according to claim 5, wherein the inner sloped surface of the process-chamber opening and the inner surface of the exhaust-passage opening are formed to having depths not less than 1/4 of the thickness of the baffle plate.

7. (Original) The process apparatus according to claim 5, wherein the baffle plate is shaped like a ring, and the plurality of slits are arranged radially on an entire circumferential surface of the baffle plate.

8. (Previously presented) The process apparatus according to claim 5, wherein each slit extends in a radial direction of the baffle plate, and the inner sloped surface of the process-chamber opening slopes from an opening rim of the slit, which faces the process chamber, toward the exhaust passage in which direction the opening of the slit is narrowed.

9. (Previously presented) The process apparatus according to claim 8, wherein the exhaust-passage opening and the process-chamber opening communicate with each other through a passage having a diameter which is not larger than the minimum diameter of the process-chamber opening that is surrounded by an inner rim of the sloped surface.

10. (Previously presented) The process apparatus according to claim 5, wherein for each slit an angle  $\theta$  formed between the sloped surface and an axis perpendicular to the openings of the slit falls within a range from  $5^\circ$  to  $30^\circ$ .

11. (Previously presented) The process apparatus according to claim 5, wherein the width  $W1$  of the process-chamber opening and the width  $W2$  of the exhaust-passage opening are set as to satisfy a condition of  $1 \leq W2/W1 \leq 1.4$ .

12. (canceled).

13. (Previously presented) The process apparatus of claim 5, wherein the sloped inner surface of said process-chamber opening is smooth.

14-17 (canceled).

18. (Previously presented) A baffle plate for partitioning a process vessel into a process chamber for processing an object and an exhaust passage communicating with the exhaust system, said baffle plate including a plurality of slits through which the process chamber and the exhaust passage communicate with each other,

wherein each slit includes an exhaust-passage opening facing the exhaust passage and a process-chamber opening facing the process chamber,

wherein at least one side of said process-chamber opening includes a sloped inner surface at least along the slit length, said sloped inner surface of the process-chamber opening formed not more than 1/2 of the thickness of the baffle plate and widens towards the process-chamber opening, and

wherein at least one side of said exhaust-passage opening includes an inner surface that is substantially perpendicular to the surface of the baffle plate, said inner surface of the exhaust-passage opening formed not more than 1/2 of the thickness of the baffle plate, and

wherein the width of said exhaust-passage opening is greater than the minimum width of the process-chamber opening that is surrounded by an inner rim of the sloped inner surface.

19. (Previously presented) The baffle plate according to claim 18, wherein the inner sloped surface of the process-chamber opening and the inner surface of the exhaust-passage opening are formed to having depths not less than 1/4 of the thickness of the baffle plate.

20. (Previously presented) The baffle plate according to claim 18, wherein the baffle plate is shaped like a ring, and the plurality of slits are arranged radially on an entire circumferential surface of the baffle plate.

21. (Previously presented) The baffle plate according to claim 18, wherein each slit extends in a radial direction of the baffle plate, and the inner sloped surface of the process-chamber opening slopes from an opening rim of the slit, which faces the process chamber, toward the exhaust passage in which direction the opening of the slit is narrowed.

22. (Previously presented) The baffle plate according to claim 21, wherein the exhaust-passage opening and the process-chamber opening communicate with each other through a passage having a diameter which is not larger than the minimum diameter of the process-chamber opening that is surrounded by an inner rim of the sloped surface.

23. (Previously presented) The baffle plate according to claim 18, wherein for each slit an angle  $\theta$  formed between the sloped surface and an axis perpendicular to the openings of the slit falls within a range from  $5^\circ$  to  $30^\circ$ .

24. (Previously presented) The baffle plate according to claim 18, wherein the width  $W1$  of the process-chamber opening and the width  $W2$  of the exhaust-passage opening are set as to satisfy a condition of  $1 \leq W2/W1 \leq 1.4$ .

25. (canceled).

26. (Previously presented) The baffle plate of claim 18, wherein the sloped inner surface of said process-chamber opening is smooth.

27-30. (canceled).